

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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LADY LOVELACE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JUDITH WYNNE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE this correspondence was going on between uncle and niece, things were not particularly sunshiny at the Hall. The weather had been changeable, and, on the whole, murky and troubled. During the eight days that followed Phil's departure to London, Edie had passed through every phase of despondency, of nervous irritability, and, consequently, of fitful temper.

Poor old Janet's daily existence was a burden to her; the squire—well, had a life of it; and as for Ellinor, no doubt she would have had a life of it too, had she not been endowed with a temperament as impervious as any English chronometer to atmospheric changes. Edie's most vehement gusts did not suffice to ruffle even the surface of her stately serenity, nor did Edie's most pungent speeches—and they undoubtedly were pungent just then—seem by ever so little to set her teeth on edge. It is easily conceivable that her equanimity was a thing born less of good-nature than of indifference. Her stay at the Hall was drawing to a close; she was not likely ever to be on very warm terms with the Fairfax family. What could their small joys and sorrows, individual or collective, their sweet or sour tempers, matter to her? How very slightly ought she, in the nature of things, to be affected by them!

So she went on her way serenely, imperturbably, ignoring equally little Edie's fits of temper and subsequent fits of remorse, preserving invariably towards her a calm, patronising, elder-sisterly attitude that made Edie feel as though she herself had suddenly been transformed into a half-

tamed Persian cat, and every hair she owned to was being persistently stroked the wrong way.

Not one letter did Edie receive from Phil.

"It's your own doing, Edie!" said the squire, as he noted his little daughter, morning after morning, make a vehement rush at the letters when they were brought in, toss them over eagerly, and then viciously shuffle them into a careless heap when she saw the one she waited for was not there.

"I know it's my own doing; of course, who could think it was anyone else's?" answered Edie, with her head very high in the air. "I didn't for a moment expect Phil would write to me; it would be very ridiculous if he were to, after what I said to him." And then she would take sudden flight, rush upstairs into her own room, and sob out her sorrows into the sofa-pillows once more.

"I have a message for you, Edie," said Colonel Wickham, coming in on the morning before Ellinor's visit at the Hall came to an end.

Edie was in the act of drawing on her gardening-gloves—inconstant active outdoor occupation was just then an absolute necessity to her. She looked up brightly at the Colonel; she knew without any telling from whom the message came.

It is just possible that if Colonel Wickham had told her that the message had come from Phil in response to a question of his own, the bright, pleasant look on her face would have given place to one of a totally opposite description.

"Phil wants to know," the Colonel went on, "how he may write to you. He says he can write but one way—the way he has always been accustomed to write."

Edie was all on fire in a moment, half

with petulance, half with delight at getting a word from Phil again.

"How ridiculous," she cried, blushing furiously, "to be able only to write one way to anyone. Why, I can write a hundred ways to people one after another as fast as possible."

"To people! Yes, possibly Phil could to 'people' in your sense of the word. But he is speaking now of one person only, Edie, and to that one person he can only write one way. Now the question is, will you give him permission to write to you in that one way—the way in which he has always been accustomed to write?"

There was no getting out of the question now.

Edie got redder and redder. Pride came to her rescue. Not the sort of pride that turned Lucifer out of heaven, but possibly near akin to that which prevented him ever asking to be taken back again.

"It is utterly absurd of Phil to ask such a question after all I have said to him," she answered, buttoning and unbuttoning her gloves quickly, nervously, as though she had a gimlet between her small fingers at work on them. "He ought to have understood perfectly—I am quite sure he does understand without asking any questions on the matter."

"Does he understand how he may write to you? That's the thing, Edie," persisted the Colonel.

"Of course he understands," and now crack, crack, crack, went one, two, three buttons in succession. "He may write to me just exactly as any gentleman writes to any lady. What more can he expect than that?"

"Is that what I'm to tell him, Edie—just as any gentleman writes to any lady?" asked the Colonel, speaking very gravely, very slowly.

"Of course, if he wants an answer to such a ridiculous question. Oh, here comes the vicar!" and Edie's voice, before attuned to a somewhat high pitch, showed a visible sense of relief. "And good gracious!" she added, making her eyes very round, "here comes Mrs. Rumsey in by the opposite gate. Why, what does it mean? They'll run into each other's arms just underneath the window."

And even as she finished speaking might be heard the cheery tones of the vicar addressing his wife.

"What, you here, my dear?"

"What, you here?" echoed his wife's voice, but she did not say "my dear," and

her tones were not so cheery as her husband's by many degrees.

"I have been hunting all over the village for you," the lady went on; "I've a hundred and one things I want to speak to you about; three times I had to send for you here yesterday."

"My dear, this is my first visit to the Hall to-day," interposed the vicar mildly.

"I should think so, seeing it's not yet eleven o'clock. If you intend taking up your quarters here——"

"Really," said Edie to the Colonel, who, standing close to the window-panes, had heard the major part of this conversation, "I think we had better show ourselves. I've never seen Mrs. Rumsey so put out before."

So they went out and exchanged greetings with the vicar and his wife, talked about the weather, the fine show of chrysanthemums at the vicarage, and an approaching tea to be given to the "good wives"—this was the local title for the attendants at a certain weekly meeting, known in most parishes as mothers'-meetings—for which Edie's personal supervision was besought.

"And I tell Mrs. Rumsey," said the vicar, looking round slyly at the Colonel, "that there'll be plenty of gossip that night. It's what you might call the tea-trait at these meetings. It always comes in with the cups and saucers."

For once in her life, Mrs. Rumsey did not respond with her invariable, "Charlie loves a joke." Could it possibly have been the sudden appearance of Miss Yorke, in her riding-habit, in the hall, just inside which they were standing, that made the words die upon her lips?

The vicar made a hasty movement towards the young lady.

"Ah, Miss Yorke, so pleased to catch you at last. Now you will be able to tell me when you will go through the schools with me."

Ellinor raised her eyebrows at him—did not take his proffered hand.

"I do not take the slightest interest in schools," she said, in a voice which suggested ice an inch thick, and the thermometer below zero. Then, as she passed in front of Mrs. Rumsey, she gave a pitying, deprecating glance towards the worthy clergyman, the slightest possible shrug with her shoulders, an appealing look into Mrs. Rumsey's face, which said, as plainly as words could say it, "Have you no control over the poor man? Cannot you keep him from making himself ridiculous?"

The vicar looked, as he no doubt felt, snubbed and rebuffed. Mrs. Rumsey grew scarlet, pursed her lips, and drew up her head as though she meant, on the spot, to take up the cudgels for her husband. Edie felt, as she always did in Ellinor's vicinity, irritable, ruffled, angry, inclined to say the hardest, bitterest, cruellest things her tongue had at command at the moment, although she knew perfectly she might as well shoot arrows at an armour-plated ship as attempt to disturb Ellinor's serenity by speech of hers, let it be never so cutting or cruel.

"Ask me to go through the schools with you, dear Mr. Rumsey," she exclaimed; "I take the very, very deepest interest in them, and so does everybody who knows how hard you have worked in them."

"I want to speak to Mr. Fairfax; is he in his study?" asked Ellinor over all their heads. "I want to tell him I must bring my pleasant visit here to an end to-morrow."

"It is eleven o'clock. Papa hates to be disturbed when he shuts himself in at eleven," said Edie coldly.

But for all that, Ellinor calmly went on her way to the squire's study. What did it matter to her whether people did or did not wish to be disturbed when she had a special desire to disturb them?

"Can it be possible," cried Edie, clasping her hands and looking ecstatic, "that she will depart and peace be restored to-morrow? Come into my sitting-room, Mrs. Rumsey; I've no end of things to talk to you about!"

"You are quite sure, Edie," said the Colonel as he took his leave, "that you cannot think of a better message to send poor old Phil, than the one you have given me?"

Edie paused a moment. In that moment, pride and love had a little skirmish in her heart. In greater battles with this somewhat perverse, yet altogether loveable young person, love invariably won the victory; in the skirmishing, which went on tolerably often, pride always carried the day. It was so now.

"Thank you for asking me again," she said, looking up in Colonel Wickham's face; "but, honestly, I can think of nothing else to say. He may write to me as any gentleman writes to any lady. That is all. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PHIL's mission to London was a gloomy one, and he undertook it with a heavy

heart. This Rodney Thorne and he had been, as Colonel Wickham had said, great chums at school and college; Phil's easy, kindly nature, solid good sense, and clear judgment saving Rodney from many a scrape in which his headlong, enthusiastic temperament would otherwise have plunged him.

School and college said good-bye to, their bonds of friendly intimacy had of necessity somewhat relaxed. Rodney, erratic and wayward to a degree, had announced his intention of going everywhere and seeing everything before he settled down as master of Thorne Hall. By his grandfather's will—his father had died when he was a mere infant—he did not come into his estates until he was twenty-five years of age; up to that time they remained under the sole control of his mother and a co-trustee, Rodney possessing only the power of drawing a certain fixed income from the estate.

His intention of "going everywhere and seeing everything" he carried out energetically, by paying a succession of flying visits to every quarter of the globe. Later on, as the inconveniences and limitations of long voyages somewhat wearied him, he reduced his orbit, and contented himself with scouring the plains and cities of Europe. Vienna, Rome, and Paris, in turn, saw a good deal of him. In the last-named city, when he had nearly completed his twenty-fourth year, he came upon his fate, in the shape of a pretty English girl, a Miss Lucy Selwyn, an orphan, who fulfilled the duties of English teacher and wardrobe-keeper in a large boys' school in the Avenue d'Eylau. How they met, where, and when, it would have been difficult to say, for Rodney preserved a strict silence on this point, and there was no near relative nor friend to ask the question of Lucy.

Rodney's conduct at this period of his history was characteristic. He made Lucy at once resign her appointment. He wrote to his mother desiring her to receive the young lady as a daughter; a desire his mother, a cold-hearted, proud woman, who had ambitious views for her son, showed not the slightest disposition to fulfil. Lucy, arriving in London unchaperoned—for whether from necessity or choice, Rodney had not travelled back with her from Paris—was received at the door of Mrs. Thorne's town-house with the message that that lady was not "at home," and was forced

to drive away with her baggage to the nearest hotel.

Rodney had been furious when he heard of his mother's treatment of the pretty, gentle orphan. He had rushed over in hot haste from Paris, and would have married Lucy there and then by special license had not, unfortunately, not only the whole of his present yearly income been run through, but the next year's been anticipated, right up to his twenty-fifth birthday, and money-lenders in all directions been laid under contribution.

Under these circumstances, he was therefore dependent solely upon the will of his mother for food, clothing, lodgings—for, indeed, the barest necessities of existence.

Also, Lucy, gentle and confiding though she had proved herself to the very last degree, was utterly destitute of that rash, headlong impetuosity which so markedly characterised her lover, and which lies at the bottom of one half the improvident marriages which are made and too late repented of.

"Why not wait a year?" she had said to him in the coffee-room of the big hotel to which, out of sheer ignorance of London and London ways, she had directed herself to be driven. "In a year's time you will be your own master, your mother will be forced to receive as your wife whoever you may choose to bring home. Possibly by that time she may be willing to be friends with me. I think I could make her love me."

So Rodney had agreed to wait the year, had sworn that Lucy was his good angel, that everything she proposed was wise and right, that if his mother could but see her she would love her as she deserved to be loved—as the sweetest, best, purest, truest girl in the world. And then he had done about the wisest and most prudent thing he had ever in his life been known to do, had transferred Lucy from the big railway hotel to a quiet, decorous young ladies' school somewhere in the vicinity of Maida Vale.

With this portion of Rodney's history Phil had been intimately acquainted, getting from him, in long weekly letters, enthusiastic descriptions of the charms of his goddess, and full details of his mother's harsh treatment of her. Then there had come a gap in the correspondence; Phil's letters, full of sympathetic condolence and cheerful encouragement, remained unanswered. Going up to London about this

time, and meeting Rodney by chance in the house of a common friend, it was not difficult to discover the reason of Rodney's silence. Ellinor Yorke was present, and Rodney had eyes, ears, speech for no one else; the last trumpet might have sounded, but Rodney would not have stirred unless Ellinor had showed a disposition to rise from her chair and go down on her knees.

Phil had looked on in amazement for a time, then he had found the opportunity for getting Rodney on one side, and asking him if Miss Yorke knew of his engagement to Lucy Selwyn.

Rodney had evaded the question, and gone back to the side of his charmer. Then Phil, as jealous for his friend's honour as he would have been for his own, had taken the law into his own hands, and had asked so pointedly after Miss Lucy Selwyn's health and happiness, that Ellinor could not fail to understand the position in which she stood towards Rodney.

After this Rodney had seemed to avoid Phil, and they had met once only before Phil had read that terrible paragraph in the newspaper. This meeting had again taken place in Ellinor's presence, and it had seemed to Phil that in no way had Rodney or Ellinor altered in their demeanour to each other. He in no wise troubled his brains as to the fact that what this young woman's behaviour was to this young man—alluring, fascinating, enthralling—such it was to every young man who crossed her path, and who chanced to be, as this one was, handsome, wealthy, and of good birth. He only saw that this friend of his, whom he had learnt to love as he would have loved a brother had one been given him, whom, in the very early days of their friendship, he had fought for, championed, protected, was on the high-road to dishonour, to faithlessness to the girl whom he was pledged to marry. And it seemed to him that this Ellinor Yorke, this surpassingly beautiful young woman who might, had she so chosen, have had peers of the realm at her feet, was alluring him along this downward path for the mere pleasure of testing the strength of her powers of allurements, and of gratifying her personal vanity.

Rodney, of course, was not to be exonerated at Ellinor's cost—there was no question of that in Phil's mind; and, outspoken and frank as he had ever been with his friend, he found the opportunity for saying some short, sharp words which

Rodney could not controvert, but which he met with an angry bitterness, a sarcastic enquiry as to how long Phil had taken upon himself the duties of dry-nurse, and a devout wish that for the future he would keep alike his eyes and his tongue in reserve for matters in which he possessed a personal interest.

These were the hardest speeches that had ever in their lives passed between Phil and Rodney. The recollection of them was very bitter to Phil now as he made his way through the London streets to the house of Rodney's mother to learn what she had to tell him of Rodney's last hours.

Mrs. Thorne's town house was situated in Eaton Square. A lurid wintry sun, near its setting, was pouring red light on the wet, leafless trees and sodden grass of the square as Phil knocked at the door. The house was closely shut from top to bottom. Phil wondered whether anyone would be there able to receive him.

"Do you think Mrs. Thorne could see me?" he asked of the man who opened the door to him.

The man was an old servant, and knew Phil well.

"I will enquire, sir," he answered. "She will see you if she can see anyone. An invitation has been sent you to attend the funeral."

The man soon came back with a message that Mrs. Thorne would see him, and Phil was shown upstairs into a small darkened room, where Mrs. Thorne was seated upon a sofa.

Candles were lighted upon the mantelpiece; they threw a faint, uncertain light on Mrs. Thorne's white face and deep crape draperies.

She was a large, handsome woman of about fifty-five years of age. Her dark hair, thickly powdered with grey, was mounted on high cushions on the top of her head in the style of Marie Antoinette; her eyebrows were dark, her eyes large and expressive. The lines of her face, always firm, had grown now to the strength and straightness of a sculptured block of marble.

She rose to greet Phil.

"It is good of you to come," she said, and her voice had a hard, metallic ring in it which almost set him shivering.

"How could I help coming! He was my dearest friend," Phil answered impetuously.

Then there fell a silence between them.

Mrs. Thorne was the first to speak.

"What do people say about it? What does anyone say?" she asked.

"I have heard nothing—I know nothing; I came up expressly to hear," answered Phil; "I saw the dreadful news last night in the paper, and came up this morning."

"The inquest was this morning; they brought in a verdict of 'Accidental Death.'"

"Ah, thank Heaven!" cried Phil, and then he stopped himself abruptly.

"Why thank Heaven?" asked Mrs. Thorne, fixedly regarding him. "What other verdict did you—did anyone else expect?"

Phil tried to recall his words.

"I am bewildered," he said; "it has all been so awfully sudden—I scarcely know what I am saying."

Mrs. Thorne looked at him steadily for half a minute, then, in a voice such as a man lying on his death-bed might use when he asks, "Doctor, is there a chance for me?" she said:

"Kindly tell me, Mr. Wickham, what reason had you for thinking my son died by his own hand?"

"Oh, none—none whatever," protested Phil; "why should I think so? I have not seen Rodney, nor had a single line from him, since July last. How could I know anything?"

Mrs. Thorne laid her hand upon his arm.

"Hush!" she said authoritatively. "I know that my son died by his own hand—no matter how I know it, I know it." She paused a moment—a sudden, dark change swept over her face. "Let that girl who wrought his ruin keep out of my path," she added; "the evil and misery she has brought to my home I will repay to her a thousand times should she come in my way."

It was said quietly, without dramatic action or hysteric vehemence. Mrs. Thorne remained seated on the sofa, nor did her voice rise one single half-tone; yet Phil felt in his inmost heart, as he sat there listening to her, that a Corsican vendetta might fail of its end, or an avenger of blood be turned from his course, rather than this woman be persuaded to let go the purpose of her heart, should opportunity for revenge be given her.

"Let us hope we are mistaken—both of us," he said gently; his voice had none of the iron firmness of Rodney's mother's. "I confess the dread was in my own

mind, but you see other people have come to a different conclusion."

"Mr. Wickham, will you tell me why the dread of such a thing was in your mind?"

Phil was silent.

"You will not. Very well, then I will tell you why the certainty of such a thing is in my mind. On the night before it happened, Rodney came here to me asking for a cheque for a very large amount—larger than he had ever asked of me before. I naturally questioned him as to the purpose for which this money was wanted. His reply was, that part was for his own use, part for another person's. I knew in a minute to whom he referred, and I mentioned the name of Miss Lucy Selwyn, saying, 'What, is the intrigue with that young person going on still?' Upon this he grew very angry, and said—well, never mind what he said, they were rude, uncalled-for words so far as I was concerned, and, so far as Miss Selwyn was concerned, seemed spoken less from hot-headed, passionate love, than from a sense of duty. I stopped him in the midst of his asseverations of this young person's innocence of life. 'Rodney,' I said, 'look up in my face, be honest with me, confess that you have ceased to love this girl, and are now only anxious to be quit of her.' His eyes drooped. 'It's true,' he said hoarsely; 'I would give worlds if she would let me go, but she will not.' 'Give me her address,' I said; 'I will go to her, talk to her, pay her expenses anywhere, and I will undertake you shall be free from her.' But this he would not do. 'It would be useless—utterly useless,' he said; 'I have implored her on my knees to release me, and she will not; she will drive me to desperation one way or another; I dare say it will end in my putting a bullet through my brain.' Those were my son's last words to me, Mr. Wickham; I have told not one living soul of them save yourself. He left me that night without saying good-bye—without answering my good-bye, even—without taking up the cheque which I had made out, and placed before him on the table. Now judge whether there is reason in what I have asserted—that he died by his own hand. Judge whether I have the right to speak bitterly of the girl who drove my poor boy to a desperate ending."

But Phil's heart at that moment was stirred, less by commiseration for Rodney's terrible fate than by a chivalrous desire to take up arms in behalf of Lucy Selwyn.

The impulse was strong on him to speak out bluntly and say:

"Mrs. Thorne, much as I loved Rodney, I am constrained to say he behaved as a scoundrel to this girl, who loved him. Another, not she, led him on to his ruin."

He did not, however, yield to it. How could he burthen this bereaved mother's heart with a new tale of treachery and weakness on her dead son's part? Why should he drag Ellinor Yorke's name before her to be a mark for her vengeance at some future day?

So he held his peace—held it so long that Mrs. Thorne looked up at him wondering and waiting for his answer. Then, as though she felt the silence somewhat burdensome, she rose from her sofa and said:

"Come, would you like to see him before you go?"

Phil looked at her in amazement:

"See him!" herepeated, picturing to himself how little like to Rodney's dark, handsome face—the face he had known and loved—must be the poor, dead, lacerated face now.

"I will not lift the face-cloth," said the mother in the same hard, cold tones as before; "I did it once, I shall not do it again. Come!"

She led the way up the darkened staircase, and opened the door of a large room on the upper floor. There was no rush of sweet flower-scents as they entered the sombre chamber, there had been no attempt to make this room beautiful with ferns and grasses, no gracious effort to smooth over the print of death's cruel, rough feet, no make-believe of keeping the Great Tyrant at bay by so much as half an hour, when the day was all his own. No; here everything was black, mournful, hateful, as it seemed to Mrs. Thorne things should be in such a death-chamber. Long black curtains hung from the windows, crape hangings hid the bright walls and pictures, even the floor of the room was covered with crape; and there, in the midst of it all, with its black velvet covering, stood the dismal coffin containing all that remained of Rodney Thorne.

Large wax-lights in solid stands stood on either side of the coffin's head. They were the only lights in the room.

Phil assisted the mother to lift the pall and raise the coffin-lid. He trembled for her, lest now her self-control might fail her, and the long-sealed well-springs of her grief might be unloosed.

No such thing. She looked steadily at the long, straight, white-swathed form without so much as a quiver of an eyelid. Then she bent low and pressed her lips lingeringly, lovingly, on one white marble hand.

She beckoned to Phil, and placed the hand in his.

"You clasped hands in life," she said; "clasp them in death."

Phil did so, and his tears fell thick and fast as he thought of how once in early schooldays that same slender, cold hand of Rodney's had struck a big, robust school-boy on the mouth who had dared to insult Phil.

And the last time they had parted it had been with angry words and with no clasping of the hand!

Phil's good-bye to Mrs. Thorne was all but incoherent.

"I may count on you for the funeral; you were one of his dearest friends," she said, speaking in much the same voice as that in which one might bid another to a wedding or birthday festival.

Phil bowed his head and pressed her hand. Then he thankfully made his escape into the fresh wintry air.

CHRONICLES OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE.

A MISTY kind of radiance hangs about the ancient county Earldom of Huntingdon. We know of one Robin Hood as a claimant for the dignity, and we may remember a King of Scotland who was also styled Earl of Huntingdon, and who held the castles of Fotheringay and Huntingdon as liege man of our lord the King of England. And to begin at the beginning, the Saxon history of the county presents some unaccustomed features. The county really belongs to East Anglia, but Siward held it—the old Siward of Macbeth, and of other legendary histories—with the mighty earldom of Northumbria. Then Tostig had it—the traitorous brother of Harold—and after the turmoil of the Conquest, we find old Siward's son, the noble Waltheof, holding the earldom, either as his father's heir, or by right of his wife, the cruel Judith, the Conqueror's niece. After Waltheof's execution, his daughter Maude brought it as her dower to some long-headed but lame and unattractive Norman baron, called Simon de St. Liz by the old chroniclers. On Simon's death, Maude married David of Scotland,

and we find a Scotch king building or repairing a strong castle at Huntingdon, in the very heart of England. But of this castle, as of any other that succeeded it, hardly a stone now remains to show.

Of it there now remains no memory,
Nor any little monument to see,
By which the traveller that fares that way,
"This once was it," may warned be to say.

And yet, when we consider how much of the land was, and still remains, fen-land; how much space was occupied by the wide, shallow meres, abounding in fish and fowl—now all drained and levelled, and producing grass and corn—while in old time, as we read, "it was much more woody than it is now, and the dere resorted to the fennes," harbouring among the alders, hassocks, and rushes—it is difficult to conceive how the county could have been the seat of a numerous warlike population. But probably the county boundaries were more extensive than now, and we shall find here and there traces showing how people were once much more thick upon the clearings—how market-towns have turned to villages, and villages have been almost lost to existence.

No one can turn his face towards Huntingdon without thinking of a certain famous brewer of that town—a brewer by repute, if not in actual fact, though the latter is probable enough. Anyhow, the site of the mansion of the Cromwells is still pointed out, with the brook of Hinchin flowing through its curtilage—wonderfully convenient for brewing or malting, to which, if he could see his way to turn an honest penny thereby, Farmer Oliver would have raised no objection on the score of gentility. Anyhow, it was not small beer that he brewed, we may be sure, this sturdy old Noll of the Cavalier legend.

And yet, as far as lineage and gentlemanhood went, the Cromwells might hold their own with any of the old families of the county. In origin they were of good Welsh blood, descended from one Morgan Ap William, who had a small estate in Glamorganshire, and was Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Henry the Seventh. With the Tudors a host of Welsh gentlemen had come to Court, and held small employments there; and many of them, no doubt, in a second generation, like Ap Williams's son, Richard, assumed English surnames, and became merged in the English population. Had Richard and his father remained in Wales the former would have been called Richard Ap Morgan—the

Welsh having, strictly speaking, no family names—but being in England, he reassumed his mother's name, who was a Cromwell, the daughter of the blacksmith of Putney—who might have had some dealings in iron with the Glamorganshire man—the blacksmith, whose son became Earl of Essex and vicar-general, the hammer of the monks, Wolsey's destructive pupil. A kind of deputy-hammer was Richard Cromwell—a hard-riding, stout, fighting man, whose prowess so delighted Henry the Eighth that he proclaimed him not only his Dick but his diamond—but with his keen business side, too, and everywhere busy among the monasteries arranging sales and surrenders. And Richard shared handsomely in the plunder—got the great abbey of Ramsey and the fat priory of Hinchinbrook, both in the county of Huntingdon, and kept them, too, in spite of his uncle's fall, and thus became one of the great men of the county.

To these possessions succeeded Sir Henry Cromwell, a generous and lavish gentleman of the old-fashioned Elizabethan type, and as such known as the Golden Knight, who pulled down the old nest of the monks at Hinchinbrook, and built a fine mansion there—a florid, handsome Tudor building, which still in the main exists, although much altered by later owners. A younger son of the Golden Knight was provided for by means of other monkish or semi-monkish spoil at Huntingdon. The old hospital of St. John made a residence for him; the stream which had turned the priors' mill, and in which Hospitalier knights, perhaps, had fished, now ran past Master Robert's brewing-vats, and afforded a little innocent pastime, no doubt, for young Oliver. For here was growing up a young scion of the Hammer pattern, destined to wield his Thor's weapon on the heads of kings. Oliver was born in the last throes of that sixteenth century which had wrought such sweeping changes. And the mother of Oliver was herself a link with the old order of things, for her great uncle had been prior of Ely long ago, and at the suppression of the priory had taken office again in a still more dignified position as dean of the cathedral, which had also been the church of the convent. And this uncle had been zealous in providing for his kinsmen. They were Stuarts, too, or Stewarts, prior and kinsmen, having descent, it is said, from the old royal line of Scotland.

Oliver Cromwell's education was that of

any ordinary young country gentleman. He went first to the grammar-school of Huntingdon, under one Dr. Beard, author of *The Theatre of God's Judgments*—not a lively piece, we may imagine. Then Oliver was entered at Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, on the very day, it is noted, on which Shakespeare died. But his father's death brought him home again without completing his course, and from that time he stayed at home at Huntingdon, with the possible exception of sundry months spent in London with some lawyer, to learn enough law for a justice of the peace. He was little over one-and-twenty when he brought home his wife from Cripplegate Church, and henceforth we see him a solid, sober young fellow, entertaining ministers of the gospel and expounding the Word himself on occasion, but with a terrible, black hypochondria upon him at times—the burden of many great souls; he often thought himself on the point of death and of judgment, and had fancies, too, about the town-cross. Then, as children came upon his hands, he sought something more productive in the way of farming and grazing, and so sold what he had at Huntingdon, and went to St. Ives, where we shall meet him presently. Then uncle Stewart died, and left his nephew, Oliver, a good estate, so that he went to live at the glebe-house, Ely, still among the clerical nests that acquisitive ancestors had feathered for him, and henceforth our county has no further share of him than belongs to the general history of the realm.

Meantime our hero's uncle and godfather, Sir Oliver, had succeeded the Golden Knight, inheriting a good deal of his father's warm and lavish nature, and his loyal devotion to the crown. But the golden age was coming to an end, and the estate of the Cromwells had become embarrassed, so that Sir Oliver withdrew to his more modest dwelling-house, the old abbey of Ramsey, and sold Hinchinbrook to Sir Sidney Montagu, of Barnwell, Northampton, one of His Majesty's Masters of Requests. And Sir Sidney becomes noticeable in literary annals for his marriage to one Paulina Pepys, the daughter of a small Cambridge-shire squire, and a relative, perhaps the aunt, of everybody's friend, Samuel of the Diary.

Our chatty, gossiping Pepys was born at Brampton, a village a mile or so from Huntingdon, and got part of his schooling at Huntingdon, no doubt at the very school

where Oliver had been before him. The family had some little property at Brampton, although Samuel's father seems to have been a citizen of London, and a tailor. To his connection with the Montagus Pepys owed his advancement in life and the opportunity of putting all the world of London in his diary. The Master of Requests had been, naturally enough, on the King's side, and had been expelled from the Long Parliament, where he sat for Huntingdonshire, on that ground; but the son, Edward, fought with credit under Cromwell, and held office as Lord of the Treasury and a Commissioner of the Admiralty under the Protector. But he was one of the first adherents to the project of the Restoration, acting the same part with the sea as did Monk with the land forces, and the first pages of Pepys's diary describes my lord's voyage to bring the King home from Breda. To reward his services Montagu was created Earl of Sandwich, a title still held by the lords of Hinchinbrook.

My Lord Sandwich was one of the unprofessional sea-captains of the period, who, without knowledge of seamanship, could fight as courageously from the deck of a ship as on land, and could lead his ships into action as well as marshal a squadron in the field. He died at last in combat with the Dutch at the sea-fight of Solebay, off Southwold. Duke James, who commanded the fleet, overcome by the sight of the carnage about him, retired from the fight, and left his captains to shift for themselves, and the Earl, surrounded by enemies, and grappled by their fire-ships, died nobly enough in the midst of smoke and flames. And so sleeps in Westminster Abbey, and without any monument to mark the resting-place of the first of a line of naval heroes to whom "Victory or Westminster Abbey" was the only acceptable alternative.

When Mr. Samuel Pepys, of the Navy Office, came to visit his father, who had given up business and retired to his little property at Brampton, he was a close neighbour to the Hinchinbrook family, his grand connections, to whom he showed himself a faithful and grateful friend, treating for the marriage of the girls, helping the boys out of their scrapes, and lending money to the Earl when he came home without a penny in his pocket from some great embassy. For Pepys, notwithstanding his extravagances in velvet-coats and periwigs, had ever a frugal mind, and was carefully accumulating

those little profits and gratifications which attached to his office. During the alarm that prevailed at the time of the Dutch invasion, when our ships were rotting in harbour for want of means to fit them out, while the King was wasting the national revenue on his pleasures—at this crisis, when the best Englishmen began to despair of their country—Pepys could think of no better way to preserve his hoarded gold than to send it, with his wife in charge, to his father in Brampton, there to be buried carefully in the garden. When the panic was over, Pepys himself went to Brampton to recover his gold, and describes the disinterment. "My father and I, with a dark lantern, it being now night, went into the garden with my wife, and there went about my great work to dig up my gold. But, Lord! what a tosse I was for some time in, that they could not justly tell where it was." At last the place was found, but the gold all loose in the mould, the bags that held it having rotted, and so Pepys unwittingly flings dirt and guineas about by shovelfuls, a thing very dreadful to poor Pepys, who dreads the approaching daylight and the eyes that may peep over his garden wall. At last, however, with much scraping and sifting, Pepys comes within twenty or thirty of his tale, and is glad it is no worse, and the lost guineas may be lying there now. Curiously enough, in 1842, an iron pot full of silver coins was discovered at Brampton, near a garden wall belonging to the old Pepys house in the village—the coins being half-crowns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles; but all anterior to the Commonwealth. But this can hardly have been Samuel's money, which he describes as all gold, and was most probably a hoard hidden by some earlier Pepys in the troubles of the civil wars.

It had been Samuel Pepys's early dream to retire to Brampton when he had accumulated a modest fortune, and to spend the rest of his days in the country—a dream never realised; and, indeed, the wish to realise it ceased with advancing years. Naturally enough, he might once have looked forward to municipal honours in his native district. And thus when he is at Whitehall one day, and sees a fisher-boat at the stairs there, with "a sturgeon newly caught in the river," he remarks apropos of the fish, "A little one, but big enough to prevent my mistake of that for a colt, if ever I become Mayor of Huntingdon."

And this little joke of our friend Pepys involves an old story which, foolish as it may seem, still has its significance. On the opposite side of the river, connected by Ouse Bridge, lies the sister but rival settlement of Godmanchester. Now Huntingdon belongs to the wold country, the "Hunting down" of the Saxon earl, but Godmanchester is in the black bog of the fens, and if not Guthrum ceaster as some say, after Alfred's renowned opponent, is anyhow probably in origin a Danish settlement, perhaps originally founded within the rampart of the once Roman station. But for long ages the rivalry of the two townships has been a pacific one, confined mostly to winged words and bitter epithets. And thus, at the uncertain date of once upon a time, it happened that during a winter flood, characteristic of these parts, when all kinds of flotsam is borne upon the turbid waters, the men of Huntingdon and the men of Godmanchester—with a fair proportion of women and children, no doubt—had turned out to watch the progress of the rising waters. Something black came floating down, rushing here with the stream and twirling there in the eddy. What could it be? The men of Godmanchester suggested a black pig—then, like the swan of the same line, a *rara avis* it seems in those parts; but the Mayor of Huntingdon swore "that the beast was a sturgeon." In the event the derelict proved to be "an asse's colt," and from that time forth it became a bitter joke to call a Godmanchester fellow a black pig, while those on the opposite bank were playfully named "Huntingdon sturgeons."

It was at Godmanchester, too, that the people of the district met King James the First on his progress, with seventy new ploughs and as many teams of horses, a sight that seems somewhat to have alarmed the nervous King, who could not make out what the strange procession meant. But the ploughmen explained that in this manner they had been accustomed to meet the Kings of England, and that they enjoyed their liberties on this customary service. What the meaning of it was neither ploughmen nor the King could say, and so they parted with mutual satisfaction after this strange meeting.

Other strange meetings might Godmanchester have known in ancient days, for just here is the crossway of three Roman or British roads. Ermin Street and the ancient trackway which preceded

the paved street—a trackway still used by drovers with their cattle, on their way to the great fairs, and known at parts as the Bullock Road, and sometimes as a certain lane—not Paradise Lane, but something quite different—then there is a third road called by "the learned" the *Via Devana*, which stretches out in a long straight course to Cambridge. There seems to have been no great road-making between the days of the Romans and the great engineering period of modern times, when the Great Northern Railway was carried pretty well from end to end through the county, corresponding closely enough to old Ermin Street as the North Western line does to Watling Street. But while the old highways encourage a growth of villages and hamlets along their course, the railways have no such influence, and thus from Huntingdon to Peterborough the line runs through the grey and green of the fennish country without the sight of a village or, nearly, of a homestead. But along the two Ermin Streets—the old which is British, and the new which is as recent as the Romans—there are many little settlements, such as Stilton, where it is hardly necessary to say that Stilton cheeses are not made, the fame of them being due to one Captain Thornhill, a noted jockey of his period, who kept The Bell Inn there, a noted sportsman's house, where he always had a special cheese from Leicestershire in cut for his patrons. The pastures of Stilton, it may be, have no especial richness, yet the place no longer answers to the description given by our friend Barnaby the bibulous in the seventeenth century.

Thence to Stilton, slowly paced,
With no bloom nor blossom graced,
With no plums nor apples stored,
But bald like an old man's forehead.

Close to Stilton lies Norman's Cross, a name which commemorates, not any Norman of the Conqueror's time, but some Northman of an earlier age, for it was known to the Saxons as *Northemannes* Cross long before the Conquest. Here for some years, during the great French war, a large number of French prisoners were kept, in barracks built for the purpose, whose weary captivity has left some traces in many an old-fashioned country-house in the shape of boxes and trinkets, neatly and curiously carved. The place is now only known as a meet for hounds, but the memory of the prisoners is preserved in the graves of those who died in the stranger's land.

More to the south are the Gildings or Giddings, three county parishes, distinguished as Great Gidding, Little Gidding, and Steeple Gidding. Little Gidding is notable for a curious instance of religious development; an attempt to found a Protestant community of celibates. The founder was one Nicholas Ferrars, born in the heart of the City of London, near Mark Lane; a Cambridge student, then an adventurous traveller, and afterwards a member of Parliament, who, convinced of a serious call, resolved to retire from the world. In Little Gidding he found a depopulated parish, and it may be noticed that in these regions on the borders of the fens there is evidence almost everywhere of a once much larger population. A large manor-house going to ruins, also, he found, and a church, converted into a barn, and to this desolate place he retired, with family, disciples, and servants, in all forty in number. Soon the industry of the community transformed the place into a pleasant retreat, with charming gardens. The intervals of labour and necessary refreshment were occupied by the religious offices of the Church of England, varied by the reading aloud of Mr. Nicholas Ferrars's own works—MSS. on religious subjects. Nicholas himself was accustomed to sleep, wrapped up in a frieze gown, on the bare boards of his dormitory, but it does not appear that he enjoined such austerity upon the rest of the community. Charles the First visited the convent during one of his journeys, and seems to have approved highly of all he saw. Again, one night he presented himself at the gates—proscribed, a fugitive, on his fatal journey to the Scots at Newark. Nicholas had then been for several years dead, but the then ruler of the house entertained the fallen King with kindness, and sped him secretly on his way next morning. The settlement, however, was regarded with suspicion by the new authorities, as a probable centre of Royalist plots, the inmates were dispersed, and Parliamentary soldiers occupied, and perhaps plundered, the place. Anyhow, they are clearly convicted of having burnt all Mr. Ferrars's precious works; which was something to be thankful for in the midst of trouble.

Still farther south, near the border of the county, we come to Kimbolton Castle, with memories of the Magnavilles, Bohuns, and Staffords, their magnificence and misfortunes. Then came the divorced queen of

Henry the Eighth to die within its walls. After that again the castle came to the Montagus, who pulled down the old place, and built the present florid structure. In the civil wars Kimbolton was strong for the Parliament, and Lord Kimbolton, who soon after succeeded his father as Earl of Manchester, was one of the Parliamentary leaders at Edgehill.

But the whole of the eastern counties were well-nigh unanimous in opposition to the royal party, and combined in an association of which Oliver Cromwell was the leading spirit, and which kept the whole of the associated counties free from any Royalist invasion. A solitary exception is to be found in the so-called battle of St. Neots, the issue of an ill-considered rising for the King which had its beginning at Kingston-on-Thames. Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, was the leader of the conspirators, who were driven out of Kingston in full rout by the Parliamentary regulars, and who rode desperately northwards, about a hundred in number, but who gathered strength as they fled, being joined by many discontented Cavaliers, till they reached St. Neots some four hundred strong.

A strange commotion this to come upon a quiet little market-town, which had hardly known anything to happen since the days of little St. Neots himself—the saint of the miraculous three fishes which, swimming in a secluded pool, surrendered one of their number daily to the saintly frying-pan, but were always found complete in tale notwithstanding. A kindly little saint, if we credit the story of his saving a hind from the huntsmen and dogs, and not deficient in resource, as witness his feat of ploughing his glebe with stags from the forest—thieves having stolen the parish oxen. Dead, he appears by the side of Alfred, and fights against the Danes. Altogether a worthy patriotic saint, dear to the Saxon heart, so that his remains were worth stealing from the Cornish parish where he died, and thus here was built a goodly priory to his honour, of which scarce a vestige remains.

The hind pursued by huntsmen and hounds was hardly in more desperate case than the handful of Cavaliers who, making a stand here, determined to dispute the whole force of the Commonwealth—three rash young noblemen, the Duke of Buckingham, a mere stripling; the Earl of Peterborough; and Lord Holland, the chief of them—with a couple of war-worn Colonels

to marshal the ranks. The one thing everybody longed for was a good night's rest after the weary ride. All seemed quiet and safe, the Parliament men baffled and left far in the rear, so that everybody slumbered and slept—the young sprigs of nobility and the old war-worn Colonels, all steeped in sleep, and the very vedettes nodding over the necks of their tired steeds.

Meanwhile, a handful of Parliament troopers had followed close on the heels of the fugitive Cavaliers, had tracked them to their place of refuge. There was a strong army-post at Hertford, reserves for the siege of Chelmsford, then in progress. These were warned for duty, and galloped off, six troops of them, fresh and in admirable order, both man and horse. Through the short midsummer night, swift and silent, with the ring and clatter of accoutrements waking the sleeping villagers, splashing through the fords, and thundering over bridges, rode these messengers of fate. They passed through Hitchin at night, and before dawn their advanced guard had reached Eatonford. A handful of Royalist horsemen guarded the bridge; these were driven in, and the strong column of horsemen thundered into quiet St. Neots.

The stout old war-worn Colonels did not lose their heads in this emergency; their men responded readily enough to the trumpet-call, and were mustered hastily in the market-place. Man against man the Cavaliers fought gallantly for a while, but were borne down by the weight and force of disciplined numbers. The stout Colonels fell, the one slain outright, the other mortally wounded, and the Cavaliers turned and fled. Buckingham and Peterborough were amongst the first flight, but Holland, the unfortunate leader of the fiasco, had not been able to get his points and laces tied in time to join the affair, and was captured in his sleeping-chamber. These sabre-slashes and pistol-shots were the last sputter of the great civil war—the first chapter of it, that is—which ended with the execution of the king. The unlucky Earl of Holland lost his head for his share of the business, the loss a little salving his honour, which had been much impeached by his brother-Cavaliers, who had accused him of having purposely caused the failure of the enterprise.

St. Ives and St. Neots seem to be inseparably connected in people's minds, although a good breadth of Huntingdon

county lies between. The man with seven wives, who was met by one going to St. Ives, is not an historical character, unless there be some shadowy reference to the saint who gave his name to the town, one Ivo, a Persian, it is said, who might have been lavish in wives in his youth. The Persian saint would hardly have been such a marvel in the seventh century as now. Anyhow, the people seem to have taken him for granted very kindly, and dying at St. Ives, which was at that time called Slepe, the Persian's bones did wonders in the customary way, and might have made the fortune of the place, but that jealous rivals, establishing an abbey at Ramsey, carried off the relics to the more powerful foundation.

As for St. Ives in its present condition, it was visited by Carlyle when busy about his Cromwell, and he notes it as a small town "in flat, grassy country, of dingy aspect as a town, and very quiescent, except on market-days. Great cattle-market going on still, as in Cromwell's time. The church looking down into the very river, fringed with gross reedy herbage and bushes, black as Acheron, streaked with foul metallic glitterings and plays of colour." Then there is Cromwell's barn still to be seen, and Slepe Hall, then a boarding-school, where Cromwell lived, according to repute. As to local tradition about him, "fifty years ago a vague old parish-clerk had heard from very vague old persons that Cromwell had been seen attending divine service in the church with a piece of red flannel round his neck, being subject to inflammation." People talk, too, of rusty old broadswords to be found in old-fashioned farmhouses, with O. C. marked on their iron hilts; and there is little doubt that arms were distributed among the faithful before the actual outbreak of the civil war. The lands that Cromwell occupied—"a staid, most pacific, solid farmer of three-and-forty"—are still to be distinguished "gross, boggy lands fringed with willow-trees at the east end of St. Ives." And we may have a glimpse of the man later on still in the home-district; now a Colonel of horse, as he stands, hat in hand, before his stout old Royalist uncle, Sir Oliver, while his men are searching the house, Ramsey Abbey, for arms and munitions. And then from this parochial kind of business in his own home-counties, he issues—the great general of the war—with now some conscious thought of the destiny in store for him.

Ramsey Abbey itself was a noted monastery in its day, with its mitred abbot and rich endowments—a learned abbey, too, with its Hebrew library and schools. The abbot had a dignified London residence in Cripplegate, and at home was lord of all the country round, with hunting over forest and fen, and fishing in the big meres. Part of the abbey church still remains in the form of the parish church, and the town, with its one long street, curiously called the Great Whyte, and the High Street, crossing its top in the form of letter T, is not without interest. But of Ramsey and its ancient abbey there are no very clear accounts to be had, and, indeed, the whole county is sadly in want of a good comprehensive history which might be made to preserve what is still extant of old local lore and tradition, and laboriously piece together what facts are scattered like little grains of wheat among the vast incoherent mass of national and private records.

WITH THE FAIRIES IN THE COUNTY LONDONDERRY.

Is there a spot in this workaday world where Titania and Oberon, and their airy train, still hold revels beneath the moon? Are Peas-blossom and Mustard-seed to be met with by mortals in nooks where sweet musk-roses and eglantine bloom? These graceful elves are, we fear, no longer in any of their ancient haunts, but a near relation of theirs, Puck the clumsy, Puck the mischievous, has always loved Irish cabins and cold whinney knowes among Irish mountains. He does not disdain to warm his ungainly limbs beside turf-fires, or to satisfy his hunger with coarse fare; and by these humble hearths, and upon these bleak hills, we have lately discovered traces of him.

The reader will be surprised to learn that he lingers in the County Londonderry—one of the most civilised regions in the north of Ireland—and may be encountered in the mountainous districts that lie between Claudy and Dungiven. The present writer has lately collected the following fairy-tales in the above-mentioned districts. The narrators were small farmers and labourers, and in every case they seemed to believe the stories they told. Some of the stories relate to a period removed from the present day by a lifetime; others to events alleged to have taken place only a few years ago. Let us

premise that the Irishman's fairy is terribly afraid of iron, for what reason we have been unable to discover.

The first anecdote we shall give—Mary's door-key, tells of an adventure which occurred to the narrator's grand-aunt.

Mary and Niel Doolan were a most exemplary couple; they had been married for more than three years without having had a single disagreement, much less a regular quarrel. Mary was very pretty, and very sweet-tempered; and clever enough for Niel. It was no sorrow to him that she could neither read nor write, for he was uneducated himself; but if she had not made good butter, and laid out her halfpence economically, he would then have had something to say. They had no children, and they were very thrifty, so they lived comfortably, and were saving money. Niel had a horse of his own which he hired out to farmers in the neighbourhood, and Mary spun yarn. It was a pretty sight to see her seated at her wheel on the threshold of her house on summer evenings, her fair hair appearing from beneath a scarlet handkerchief, and her shapely bare foot on the treadle.

As she lived by the roadside, on the highway to Limavaddy, numbers of people were familiar with her charms; she had a wide circle of acquaintances, and a cheery greeting for all—indeed, she greeted strangers of whose very names she was ignorant, just as pleasantly as if they had been old neighbours. On a certain May Eve, she sat crooning an old ballad over her spinning, when a group of low-set people drew near, and stood watching her, but a little out of her sight. The traffic on the road had ceased, and if anyone had observed the group he would have thought that a party of village-children were listening to Mary's song. But the low-set people had old, quaint faces; they were very unlike children. They chattered and laughed in low tones, and pointed at Mary. After standing there for some time, they went down the valley of the Burnies, and disappeared among the hazels and birches of the thicket near Burnie Bridge.

The Burnies was the only pretty or romantic spot between Mary's cottage and Limavaddy. There were fertile fields and marshy tracts, and hills and dales in abundance, but the country was bare of trees and uninteresting, with the exception of that one lovely dell, where hazels and willows bent from a steep

bank over a clear, rippling stream, and a dreamy, gurgling sound was heard above the pebbles. Ladies and gentlemen from Dungiven and Limavaddy often made picnic-parties to the Burnies; and country girls went there in autumn to pick the large blackberries which hung in rich clusters over the stream, or nuts for Hallow E'en; but none of them had ever caught sight of the low-set people, who disappeared on that particular May Eve among the wild-roses and woodbine, at sundown.

A blackbird whistled loudly above the moss-grown rock, and thrushes and robins sang their evening song. The birds and rabbits knew that it was May Eve, and that they might see the fairy-train. Mothers put salt upon their children's heads on that evening, if obliged to send them a message to the shops, or to neighbours' houses; and in any house where an infant lay in its cradle, the mother was sure to put the tongs across it, if forced to leave the fire-side for a moment. Mary had no fear of danger for herself, though it was May Eve; she was safe and happy by Niel's side.

On the following morning she set out with yarn, to sell in Limavaddy-market, and Niel bade her take the house-key in her hand.

"You'll maybe be home afore me, Mary," said he, "for I ha' business wi' John Marshall, at the old chapel wall, that may keep me late; but if I can at all, I'll overtake you on your way home, and gie you a lift on the horse."

"Do come home wi' me, for any sake, Niel, my jewel," said his pretty wife coaxingly, "for I'm still lonesome, wantin' you."

She sold her yarn, and set out towards home, with the door-key in her hand, thinking that Niel was a lazy fellow not to have been ready to accompany her. But she was not more than a mile from Limavaddy when she heard the trot of a horse, and her husband overtook her. He helped her up behind him, and they rode on very comfortably, her arm round his waist and her feet hanging down against the horse's flank. They reached the bottom of the next hill to the Burnies, and Mary said:

"Let me down a wee while, Niel dear, an' I'll walk up the Brae; my feet is a wee cold."

He assisted her to dismount, and rode on slowly, thinking every moment that she would overtake him; but it grew dusk, and still there was no sign of her. He turned back, and went to the foot of the hill where

she had got off, but could not find a trace of her.

"Mary—Mary, where are you, my honey?" he called. There was an echo at the place, and his own words came back to him, but Mary's silvery tones were unheard. Now and then a whin-bush—i.e., furze or gorse—rather taller than others in the hedge, attracted him, and he rode up to it, fancying it might be his wife. Then, feeling extremely puzzled, he went home. It was just possible that Mary might have passed him in the uncertain light, and might now be preparing his supper. But the door was locked, and all within dark as pitch; so the poor fellow had nothing for it but to ride back to the spot where he had seen her last.

After another fruitless search he went dejectedly home and crept into the house by the bedroom-window. He got a match-box, laid the turf together, and kindled a fire, and then he sat down in front of the blaze with his chin in his hands.

What should he do without his bonnie Mary? Why had he left her alone in the dangerous neighbourhood of the Fairy Glen? All the tales his mother and grandmother had told him of women and children being carried away by the "good people" recurred with frightful clearness to his memory. It was true that Mary was fair enough to win fairy hearts. While he remained sunk in dejection, he heard a noise and looked round. His wife was coming through the "room" door, with the house-key bent and twisted into a curious shape in her hand. The hand was bleeding, and two of the fingers were broken.

"It's weel I had the key wi' me, Niel," said she, sinking down in her own place by the fire, and gasping as if exhausted and terrified, "for they tried hard to tak' me awa' wi' them, an' they couldna get doing it because I had the key."

"Who, my darling—who?"

"Whisht, Niel—whisht! it was them we willna name. They came round me at the foot o' the Burnie's Brae, an' they tried to get pulling the key from me, but I held tight. I thought there was twenty wee hands in this key at oncet, Niel, an' still I held tight for your sake. I didna wish them to tak' me awa' from you. There was a big wheen o' them, baith women an' men, all dressed in red. It's weel you gave me the key wi' me this day."

This adventure happened many years ago. Niel and Mary have long been dead

and gone, and none of the present generation have seen the fairies of the Burnies.

The following story is of recent date: Tom McEthinney was going home from work one winter evening, when, as he passed a thicket in a lonely place the moon shone out, and he saw a funeral procession—the coffin carried by four men, while a crowd of people followed. His surprise was very great. Who would have a funeral at that hour, and whither was the corpse being borne, for there was no churchyard or cemetery near? Besides, he had not heard of a death among his neighbours—and stop—were those short men his neighbours?

He happened to have his door-key in his hand, and on the impulse of the moment he flung it upon the coffin. Very astonishing was the result of the action; the coffin fell to the ground, and the bearers and funeral cortege disappeared. Tom plucked up courage to touch the lid, and finding that it was not nailed down he raised it. Was that a corpse within? The face was pale certainly, and the eyes were closed, but there was no look of death. He looked again. Surely he knew that face. The supposed corpse was his neighbour's son, young Brian Cassidy, the handsomest youth in Glenedra. While he gazed at him, Brian opened his eyes and spoke.

"Is that you, Tom? I ha' been sleepin'," and as he stretched himself the coffin crumbled away, and left not a board behind.

"Can you stand, Brian dear?"

"Aye, bravely! What's wrong wi' me, Tom?"

When they reached the village of Glenedra they heard loud cries proceeding from Cassidy's house, and they walked in upon a mournful scene. On the bed lay Brian, to all appearance laid out in his shroud. The women had washed and dressed him, and were now giving vent to their grief. As Tom looked from the living Brian to the dead Brian, he felt more puzzled than ever, and he hardly found words to explain his adventure to the parents.

They, on their part, had as confused a story to tell. Brian had suddenly fainted dead away, and had never come to, and all was being prepared for his wake and funeral. Grief now gave place to joy. Brian, with hearty appetite, sat down to eat the delicacies that had been provided for the visitors to his wake.

"An' now," said he, when strength and courage had returned to him, "what'll we do wi' thon rascal?" glancing at the supposed corpse on the bed.

Terror kept his parents and neighbours speechless.

"Bring him here, an' lay him on the fire," proceeded Brian. "Gie me a hand wi' him, Tom dear."

The corpse grew lighter and lighter in their arms, and by the time they reached the fireside, it was found that they held nothing but a blackthorn-stick!

Paddy Mulreany was a very civil, obliging man, on excellent terms with all his neighbours. He lived in the Benedy, a "very gentle place"—i.e., a place haunted by the fairies; but he himself had had no experience of them—as far as he was concerned there might be no "good people" within many miles of his house. Yet he made his wife sweep her hearth and leave a bright fire burning when she went to bed, as his mother and grandmother had always done. Sometimes his bannocks of oat-bread were nibbled at the edges, but his wife said that mice must have got into the barrel where they were kept. Paddy's house was at the foot of the mountain. His goat and donkey grazed on patches of the short, sweet grass that grew between clumps of heather on the mountain behind the house.

One evening, when he went to drive the animals home, he saw a tiny woman eating bilberries beside a rock. She was bending over the little bush, and her face was hidden; but he felt a curiosity about her for she was not like anyone he had ever seen before, so he bade her "good-evening" in his civil way.

She turned round with a smile, and talked to him very pleasantly.

"We ha' had a nice, wee chat, Paddy Mulreany," said she, when he was about to take leave of her.

"How do you know my name?" he asked in surprise.

"How wad I not know your name, an' me livin' here aback o' your house for ninety good year an' more. I knowed your mother an' your grandmother too, an' your old father, an' civil, decent neighbours they were, the whole o' them. But they werena a hair better nor you, Paddy, for you're a civil man."

"Deed, ma'am, I never harmed anybody, to my knowledge."

"Ay, Paddy, that's the character you'll

get from us, anyway. Ay, an' your woman, too. Will you an' her come an' see me next Sunday?"

"With all the pleasure in life," replied he, very much puzzled; "but where do you live?"

"Here! if you knock on this rock just here," showing him a particular spot, "it will open, an' you'll get into my house; an', listen, Paddy, always leave some broken bread in your barrel, for we cannot break your big bannocks."

Paddy's wife was frightened when she heard of the invitation, and she would not suffer her husband to go near the rock on Sunday, so the visit was not paid, but she obeyed the little woman about the bread, and found that little pieces of oaten-cake and little drops of milk were taken regularly, and everything continued to prosper with them.

The "good people" expect liberal treatment from their neighbours; they like to have a share of whatever is going in farmhouse or cottage.

A girl, called Kitty Majilton, was hired by a rich farmer, one Joseph Quigley, at Derrychrier. Kitty seemed to be a useless, awkward girl, and her master and mistress were much provoked with her. One thing especially annoyed them—she spilt the milk every evening in bringing it across the yard from the cowhouse. This made Joseph almost decide upon turning her off. But as he was walking past some "scrogs and scraws"—i.e., wild, natural wood, on his farm—he heard a child crying and asking for milk, and a voice replying, "Whisht, wean—whisht! Sure you'll get your drink when Joseph Quigley's cows is milked."

Joseph laid these words to heart, and walked home thoughtfully to tell what he had heard. "I'll tell you what you'll do," said he to Kitty. "You'll milk a little pigginful this evening, an' tak' it to them scrogs an' scraws, an' call out 'Kep,' an' throw the piggin in among them."

Kitty did so, and next morning a great noise of singing and shouting was heard, and invisible hands unloosed the cows in the byre, and drove them out to grass.

It would seem that the fairies are very unreasonable and capricious in their spite, and their punishments utterly disproportioned to whatever offence they may have been offered. It was so in the case of poor Paddy Brogan, of Oaks Lodge. Paddy's boots needed mending, so, as he possessed

only one pair, he set out to the shoemaker's with them upon his feet. He sat barefooted beside the shoemaker's bench till eleven o'clock at night, watching the patching being done, then, very tired and sleepy, he made his way home. His road lay past the gate of Oaks Lodge, and for a quarter of a mile through a picturesque wood, consisting of hazels, birches, and hollies. He knew that the wood belonged to the fairies, but he did not dream of danger, having "never disoblged the 'good people' to his knowledge." There was a bright moon, and the feathery bare branches of the wood, the silvery stems of the birches, and black arms of the thorns looked weird and beautiful. Paddy was plodding homeward, anxious to get to bed, when he heard voices on the other side of the hedge. "There's old Paddy Brogan, going home to bed," said one.

"Let's chase him," said another. "Let's take the boots off him," said a third.

Paddy fancied that the speakers were his neighbour's children, who were trying to play a trick upon him, so he threw his hat at them over the hedge. There was a yell of rage; he was surrounded by a crowd before he knew where he was; he was thrown down on the road, his boots were pulled off, and when he struggled to his feet he was pelted with them. His boots seemed to be multiplied into fifty pairs at least, for they were always flying after him, and as soon as they fell to the ground were picked up and thrown at him again. He was pursued to his own door, crept into the house half dead, and kept his bed for nine weeks.

Kitty Donnelly had always known that the old thorn-tree in her field was a "gentle bush," consequently she was not surprised when her little son, Francie, came running into the house one day to say that there was a tiny, wee man, dressed in green trousers and red jacket, sitting in the tree. All Francie's brothers and sisters ran to see the marvel, and his mother followed; but they could see nothing but leaves, and flowers, and lichen-grown boughs. Next day a baby was born in the cottage. It was dressed, and lying on the nurse's knee when the father came home from his work.

"What way's Kitty?" he enquired.

"Rightly; she's sleepin' there in the bed," was the reply.

He went over to the bed; it was empty! It was impossible that she could have got

up and walked out of the house, and nobody had been seen to enter. The gravest fears took possession of the husband. He thought of the thorn-tree in his field, and of how he had broken a branch off it to drive the cows home.

Sinking their voices to a whisper, he and the nurse spoke of the "good people." They knew it was useless to seek the lost woman.

Nine melancholy weeks passed, and Donnelly was beginning to grow accustomed to his sad condition as a widower, when one evening his wife walked into the house and sat down in her old place.

"Where were you, jewel, all this time?" asked the husband.

"I ha' been very near you, dear," she replied; "but I darena say more;" and she trembled.

"An' were you well-treated, darlin'?"

"I got the best o' gude treatment; but dinna ax me more. I darena say one word."

She was greatly changed: her cheerfulness was gone, and she sat silent, hardly noticing the children. She did not improve as time went on. She had been a smart, clever woman, bright and active—she was now almost a simpleton, and poor Donnelly had to be both father and mother to the family.

They soon afterwards went to America, and nothing further was ever heard of them at Tamneyarnet. The next man who took the farm stubbed up the thorn, and as he was ploughing the land, his horse dropped down dead.

"Is it, then, so very dangerous to meddle with a 'gentle bush'?" we asked the old man, who told us the above story.

"Dangerous!" he cried, "faix an' troth it is! Ax my woman, there, what happened to me from meddling wi' ane o' them bushes."

His wife, who was bedridden, raised her grey head, and looked out of her curious bed in the wall, full of eager interest.

"Ay," she croaked, "he'll tell you what occurred, an' he's a man wouldna tell a lie no more nor the clergy in the pulpit."

We hastened to express our faith in the old man's veracity, and our anxiety to hear his adventure. He turned his chair so as to face the open door, which commanded a view of the little river Owenbeg, running between shelving, muddy banks, whereon shabby willows and alders grew at intervals. Just opposite the cabin, on the

very edge of the stream, was a stunted thorn.

"Do you see thon bush, ma'am? When we came to live here I conceited it wad be easy cut down for the fire, an' I took my hatchet, an' went for to do it. Weel, I had gave no more nor the first wee hack, when my foot caught in a hole that I never seen before, an' I fell into the water on my face. The water was low, for there had been a long drowth, an' I thought I'd get out in a minute; but they rowled an' rowled me over an' over in the bed o' the river, till I was near hand drowned; an' when I came home to my woman my shirt was full o' sand."

"You never tried to cut that bush again?"

"In troth I did not! 'Deed thon woman wouldna ha' let me attempt it. I was glad to get off wi' the life; but I didna know the bush belonged to them, or I'd ha' been lazy to take the hatchet to it."

"Do you know of any more adventures? See, here is an ounce of tobacco in exchange for your experiences."

The old fellow eyed the tobacco wistfully, rubbing his head as if to quicken his memory.

"There was a farmer—a Davy Latimer—up at Lignapaisthe," he began, "that fleeced his cottier to stub up a thorn-bush on his land. The man wasna willing to do it, but the master said he'd gie him all the seed-potatoes he required, so at long an' at last he went an' destroyed the tree. His cow was on the mountain wi' Davy Latimer's cattle, an' she couldna be found that night when his beasts was brung home. I mind the lamentation there was, an' all the neighbours tellin' the poor man he shouldna ha' put a hand to thon tree. Next morning his cow was found dead—drowned in a bog-hole."

The fairies appear to interest themselves deeply in the birth of mortal babes, and sometimes are in a position to give a father the earliest intelligence of the arrival of a little stranger in his family. Micky Madick was on his way home from Feeny Fair one evening, when he was overtaken by a group of horsemen whom he had never seen before. He was surprised to see such a number of riders together, and still more surprised when they greeted him one after another:

"Good-evening, Micky Madick! Good-evening, Micky Madick!"

"Good-evening kindly," said Micky, and

he tried to get up with them as they rode on in front, but with all his exertion he could not reach them.

At length they approached the river Owenbeg at Tamneyarton bridge, and leaving the high-road went down the bank into the river. As Micky bent over the bridge, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of the horsemen, he saw nothing but the tumbling water and the muddy bank; but he heard the words: "Hurry home, Micky Madick, for your wife has got a fine son." Micky hastened home as he was told, and found the news correct.

The elves seem to have taken an unselfish interest in Micky's domestic felicity. In the case of William Taggart they were not so kind. William set forth one night in haste to bring the "sage femme" to his sick wife, and on his way home, accompanied by the woman, saw a light in a little copse which they were obliged to pass through to reach the house. Behold, there was a cottage in the wood where by day only a hedge was to be seen, and a circle of women sat before the door rocking a cradle and singing to a babe. A few steps brought William to his own door, and he found that his wife had given birth to a stillborn son in his absence. It was no use to go back into the copse to search for that mysterious cottage—all was dark; no sound of singing, no glimpse of nurses or infant to be perceived. To his dying day William believed that his son had been stolen at the moment of his birth, and was living with the fairies.

SOME AMATEUR ACTORS.

It is a curious fact that our French neighbours, "born actors" as they are said to be, and for whom everything relating to the drama and its interpreters possesses a never-failing attraction, display comparatively little inclination or aptitude for private theatricals. Now and then, but at rare intervals, some enterprising leader of fashion may organise the getting up in her drawing-room of one of Alfred de Musset's or Octave Feuillet's *Proverbes*, or perhaps offer to her intimates an original trifle by some patrician votary of the muse; but even then the female characters are almost invariably sustained by professional actresses engaged for the occasion, and supported, more or less efficiently, by two or three amateurs persuaded by the hostess to brave

the ordeal. These exhibitions, however, are exceptional, the Parisians, as a rule—whether deterred by the necessity of learning their parts, or by an instinctive mistrust of their histrionic ability matters little—endorsing in this respect the opinion of the Oriental spectator of a cricket-match, who expressed his astonishment that anyone should take the trouble of doing himself what he could get others to do for him.

It was not so in the days when Marie Antoinette, in all the splendour of her radiant beauty, delighted to personate the heroines of Sedaine and Beaumarchais on the miniature stage of the Petit Trianon. There, from 1776 to 1787, figured successively the royal princesses, the gay and gallant Count d'Artois (afterwards Charles the Tenth, of priest-ridden memory), Madame Diane de Polignac, M. de Crussol, and the Count de Vaudreuil, the same at whose château of Genevilliers took place the first representation of *The Marriage of Figaro*. M. Campan, the father-in-law of the authoress of the *Memoirs*, filled the double office of prompter and stage-inspector. The audience chiefly consisted of those members of the royal family not engaged in the performance and their personal attendants, while the post of critic was exclusively monopolised by the complaisant Grimm. If we may believe contemporary accounts, the company, although far from meriting the flattering encomiums of Diderot's correspondent, was fairly good, the Queen and M. de Vaudreuil being generally acknowledged to bear away the palm. The amiable Madame Elizabeth, however, proved, on the contrary, so incompetent an actress that she soon retired from the arena, and was advantageously replaced by the Duchess de Guise.

Shortly after the restoration of the Bourbons, two amateur companies, respectively managed by Madame d'Abrantès and Madame Sophie Gay, performed alternately in the private theatre of M. de Castellane in the Faubourg St. Honoré. The latter lady, who had attained a certain celebrity as a novelist and as the librettiste of Paër's *Maitre de Chapelle*, contributed to the repertory several clever comedies, for the interpretation of which she was especially fortunate in securing the best available talent of the day, including such able coadjutors as Count d'Adhémar, M. de Cuchet, and the pretty Mdle. Lambert. Madame Gay's witty daughter Delphine, the first wife of Emile de

Girardin, alludes to one of these pieces in her delightful *Courriers de Paris*, an extract from which may be appropriately appended here:

"We had lost sight of one of our friends for the last three weeks; no one, not even his own family, knew what had become of him. He was neither to be found in society, nor at the opera, nor in the Bois, nor even at home; in short, people began to suspect that he was the victim of some unrequited attachment. At last, one day, we chanced to meet him, walking very fast, and looking as if he had all the cares of the world upon his shoulders. 'Where have you been?' we asked. 'No one ever sees you now.' 'I can't stop to talk,' he replied; 'they are waiting for me at M. de Castellane's rehearsal;' and off he started again. 'What part can they have given him?' we thought. 'Henri Quatre, perhaps!' (they were then rehearsing Madame Gay's comedy); but, being profoundly ignorant of his dramatic capabilities, we were unable to come to any conclusion.

"When the night of performance arrived, we resolved to be on the look-out for him. The first act ended amid great applause, but no signs of our friend as yet. Some allusion had been made to a brother of the heroine, who was to appear in the second act, so we waited; but, when he came on, we beheld a perfect stranger. During the entr'acte, in which the battle of Ivry was supposed to take place, we heard the roar of the cannon, and said to ourselves, 'The soldiers of the League will be here presently, and no doubt he is one of them.' Not at all. In they marched, but we looked in vain; he was not there. When the curtain fell we began to be uneasy about him. He must have been taken ill, we concluded, and obliged to throw up his part. At that very moment, who should accost us but our friend himself, in a high state of excitement. 'What a success!' he exclaimed. 'It has quite overpowered me.' 'You!' we said; 'what have you to do with it?' 'Everything,' he retorted. 'Without me there would have been no piece at all.' 'Why, you were not Henri Quatre; what were you, then?' 'The cannon,' he replied, 'and uncommonly hard work it was.'"

With us, private theatricals have of late years become a recognised and highly-popular feature in the programme, not only of country house gatherings, but also of metropolitan "matinées," or, rather,

"afternoons." In my younger days, such exhibitions of talent or incompetency—as the case might be—were comparatively rare, and, consequently, excited a far greater sensation than they would be likely to produce at the present time. I can remember, as far back as 1825, a performance of *The School for Scandal*, for the benefit of a charity, at the Cheltenham Theatre, patronised by the Berkeley Hunt, the master of which time-honoured institution was then Colonel Berkeley, afterwards successively Baron Segrave and Earl Fitzhardinge, and one of the best light comedians of that period. He naturally played Charles Surface, and his brother Grantley, Joseph, the other parts, with the exception of Lady Teazle, for which the charming Maria Foote had been expressly engaged, being exclusively filled by amateurs. I was then hardly of an age to appreciate the merits of the actors, but can perfectly recollect that for weeks before and after the eventful night nothing else was talked of at Cheltenham.

In Mrs. Kemble's delightful Records, an amusing account is given of the production at Bridgewater House, in 1831, of Lord Ellesmere's version of *Hernani*, played by herself, Mrs. Bradshaw (Maria Tree), Lord Francis Egerton, and Messrs. Craven and Henry Greville. Describing one of the rehearsals of the drama, she says, "Everything went very smoothly till an unlucky young 'mountaineer' rushed on the stage, and terrified me and Hernani half to death by inarticulating some horrible intelligence of the utmost importance to us, which his fright rendered quite incomprehensible. He stood with his arms wildly spread abroad, stuttering, spluttering, madly ejaculating and gesticulating, but not one articulate syllable could he get out. I thought I should have exploded with laughter, but, as the woman said who saw the murder, 'I knew I mustn't (faint), and I didn't.'"

Of a later performance of the same piece at the St. James's Theatre in 1847, Macready says in his *Reminiscences*, "Greville and Craven were very good for amateurs, but tragedy by amateurs!" Further on he remarks, "As an amateur performance it was exceedingly good, but this commendation is held of no account by the actors, and they desire to be judged on positive grounds. They seem to be under a perfect delusion as to their degrees of skill and power in this art, of which they do not know what may be called the very rudiments."

One of the most deservedly successful essays of the kind within my recollection, was an almost impromptu entertainment organised by Lady Cowley at the British Embassy in Paris, in 1845; the pieces chosen for the occasion were portions of *The School for Scandal*, and *Charles the Second*; or, the Merry Monarch, preceded by a smartly written prologue from the practised pen of Lady Dufferin. As a matter of course, Charles Sheridan, "a sort of younger brother of the Apollo Belvedere," as Fanny Kemble calls him, played Charles Surface, and Mr. Lawrence Peel (brother of Sir Robert) Joseph; both were excellent, as was also Mr. Brooke Greville. "The star of the evening, however, and really one to shine on any stage," says Macready, who was among the audience, "was Miss Mac-Tavish (who subsequently married the Hon. Henry Howard) as Mary Copp. Her acting was naive, sprightly, arch, simple, and beautiful"—a very pretty compliment from so severe a critic of non-professional histrionics as the great tragedian.

In February, 1849, I was present at a performance of *Richelieu*, and *The Captain of the Watch*, at the Strand Theatre, the male personages in both pieces being sustained by the leading amateurs of the day. Mr. Davidson, a really good comedian, whose conception of the character was modelled after that of Macready, was the Cardinal, and Colonel Charles Seymour, one of the handsomest officers in the army, Louis the Thirteenth. In the comedy, the part originally played by Lafont was appropriately assigned to Captain (now Sir Henry) de Bathe, and the cast including the charming Mrs. Nisbett and her pretty sister, Miss Jane Mordaunt, a more satisfactory ensemble of all-round acting could not possibly have been desired.

It is hardly necessary to advert to the illustrious band of literary and artistic volunteers, who, some five-and-thirty years ago, carried out their noble design of relieving the needs of their less fortunate brethren by the display of genuine histrionic talent, and who, in *Every Man in his Humour*, and the late Lord Lytton's *Not so Bad as We Seem*, won golden opinions from admiring thousands. Few, if any, of these now survive, but the object of their untiring efforts, and the earnestness of purpose by which it was triumphantly attained, are not likely to be soon forgotten.

Amateurs of this stamp are not to be classed with the ordinary run of stage-struck tyros, whose only ambition is to

while away an idle hour, and display their pretentious incapacity before a drawing-room audience, happily unconscious of the not altogether benevolent criticisms to which they are exposed. In nine cases out of ten the parties principally concerned in these exhibitions have not the remotest idea of what is technically called the "business" of the stage; their attitudes and gestures are stilted and unnatural, and their attempts to appear at ease deplorable failures. They either gabble nervously through the dialogue or are completely inaudible; moreover, their memory generally fails them at the very moment when they most need it, and the unlucky individual who has good-naturedly undertaken the office of prompter finds his task anything but a sinecure. If by chance a well-meant piece of advice from a more experienced colleague is hinted to them, it is quietly pooh-poohed, and never acted on. Neophytes are apt to imagine themselves omniscient, and although they profess their readiness to profit by any suggestion, invariably discover some more or less plausible reason for declining to accept it.

As long as people are content to limit their dramatic aspirations to farces or one-act pieces, requiring, at most, three or four personages, the infliction may be endured, for it is comparatively soon over. A telegram dispatched to Mr. Lacy's successor in the Strand (Mr. French) will ensure the speedy arrival of materials amply sufficient for their purpose, neither entailing the difficulties of complicated scenery nor demanding much mental exertion in the shape of study. It rarely happens, however, that lady amateurs are satisfied unless their airs and graces are becomingly set off by at least half-a-dozen changes of costume, the inevitable consequence being that a five-act comedy is unanimously decided on, ostensibly as furnishing a better opportunity for the development of their artistic talent, but in reality for the glorification of Worth or Madame Elise. Then comes the casting of parts, and the stage-manager, whoever he may be, has a hard time of it—"all are Hamlets, and none are Laertes." No one will play second fiddle or yield an inch in the important item of precedence, and it is only when the fair ones are thoroughly convinced that matters must be amicably arranged, or the projected performance abandoned, that the characters are at last allotted, and the rehearsals begin. On these, and on the

final effects of their united labours, we may charitably drop the curtain, merely premising that whatever may be the comedy selected for the evening's entertainment, the result is tolerably certain to remind the spectator of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

LEFT OUTSIDE.

A STORY OF KENSINGTON GARDENS.

CHAPTER II.

THERE is no denying that the life of a nursery-governess in a fashionable London household is generally of a somewhat monotonous and unexciting character, so that I am not going to try to make it appear that that of Susan Lane was in any way remarkably so. Some of her friends, indeed, thought it a very fortunate one, and perhaps they were right. The eldest daughter of a country surgeon, whose death had left his wife and family very badly off, she was considered exceptionally lucky in being taken at seventeen as companion by an elderly invalid lady, an old patient of her father's, and living within a mile or two of her home; and Susie herself, though shedding many tears at parting for the first time in her life from mother and "the children," had rejoiced at being still within reach of them, and able to add to their comfort by the contribution of more than half of her small salary.

But the old lady, not taking to Dr. Lane's successor, removed to London very shortly afterwards so as to be near some fashionable physician, whose fame had reached her; and under his assiduous care she grew so rapidly worse that Susie's twenty pounds soon became the hardest earned wages that ever girl received. She was patient and willing, most gentle of voice and touch, and with a temper so impossible of ruffling, that even jealous ladies'-maids and imperious cooks gave up the attempt in despair, and merely walked roughshod over her without attempting to embitter the performance by any undue aggravations. Her employer, too, was really fond of her; but as her liking showed itself by letting no one else read aloud to her by day, sit up with her at night, or give her her food and medicine at all times, Susie's post proved no sinecure; and the almost constant confinement to two hot rooms from which every breath of outer air was jealously excluded, the disturbed nights and unvaried society of

a feeble, querulous invalid, so told on her young health and strength, that only a very little while before the old lady's death she broke down herself, and had to be sent home to recruit.

It was a pity; for her employer only lived a few weeks longer, and, perhaps—who knows?—if Susie had been with her to the end, might have remembered an oft-repeated promise to leave the girl something at her death. As it was, Susie got her salary paid to the day, and nothing more; not even a message in acknowledgment of her eighteen months of willing care and nursing, while at home she found several changes in prospect. An uncle in Canada had sent for her brother, offering to adopt him out there, and her mother was about to be married again to the vicar of the parish in which she had made her home since her widowhood. He, too, had been married before, had one son, and was by no means a rich man; so, perhaps, he was justified in thinking that he did as much as could be expected of him when, for the sake of the pretty, plaintive-eyed little widow, he took upon him the burden of her two younger children, and bestirred himself all he could to find a fresh situation for the elder girl, who had already proved herself capable of earning a living for herself.

Susie fully agreed with him. Why should she not work? It was all quite just and fair, and she felt thankful to her future stepfather when, after staying at home barely two months to recruit her shattered health, he told her one day that he had found her a situation as nursery-governess to the children of a Mrs. Farquharson, in London. The lady had written that she did not require any very severe accomplishments, her children being very young, but rather someone who would be patient, gentle, and energetic; moreover, "a lady" (underlined), so as to require no vulgar supervision as to her own conduct; and fond of exercise, as the little girl, being very delicate, required to be kept in the open air a great deal, and amused, instead of having her mind forced by many lessons.

Mrs. Lane declared with tears of gratitude that the place seemed made for dear Susie, and to the girl herself it sounded very pleasant. Easy lessons, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and the merry prattle of children, were just what would do her good after the close, stived-up rooms and wearisome invalid of her last situation; and she looked forward to

this with cheerful gratitude for having obtained it.

She had held it now for more than two years, and if it had not turned out quite the paradise she expected, she was sufficiently exempt from any active ill-treatment or misery in it to have never once thought of leaving it.

Mr. Farquharson was a stockbroker living in Clanricarde Gardens, and his wife was a very gay and fashionable person, not quite so well off in reality as she liked to appear to the world she lived in, and, therefore, more inclined to save in those necessary household matters which did not show than in the merely ornamental ones which did. If you had a nursery-governess and no baby actually in arms, you could manage with one nurse; it would only be arranging the children's walks and meals a little differently; and while Egbert and Tommy were only eight and nine, they could do with half-a-day's schooling at the fashionable day-school for boys which they attended hard-by, and work up with Miss Lane in the afternoon.

Mrs. Farquharson was a capital manager, and arranged every item of her household rule so well that, as Susie had said, there was plenty for her to do from the moment when she got up in the morning till she lay down at night.

But, after all, what can be better for a girl than plenty of occupation?

Mrs. Farquharson had early enquired of her young governess if she had any friends in London, and being answered in the negative, had said very charmingly:

"Well, my dear Miss Lane, I can't be unselfish enough to regret it, as I hope that will induce you to attach yourself more to ourselves." She added shortly afterwards: "It is such a comfort to me to know that I can always depend on you, as a young lady, to keep yourself to yourself, and not compromise your own dignity or mine by any improper intimacies. There is nothing I could less endure than to leave my children to some vulgar young woman who might either neglect them or bring them in contact with her own undesirable associates. Now, you, I feel sure, have been too well brought up to even wish to know anyone not already known to and approved of by your mother and her excellent husband."

And Susie had smiled faintly and assented vaguely, not seeing in her simplicity that this brief sentence did in sober fact relegate her to the undivided

society of five children under ten, and the nurse who shared the care of them with her.

Mrs. Farquharson Susie only saw, and perhaps exchanged half-a-dozen words with, at breakfast and lunch. Indeed, it was not by that lady's will that they met at the former meal, it being no part of her plan to make a companion of her nursery-governess; but her husband had insisted of late on having the three elder children down to breakfast with him, on the plea that, as he never saw them (Sundays excepted) at any other time, he would not even know them if he met them in the street; and it was therefore necessary to have Miss Lane down also to see that they behaved themselves.

They were not loveable children. It may be a hard thing to say, but I doubt if many of the fashionable children of the period are. It is not their fault, but that of their education. Their mothers have nothing to do with them beyond bringing them into the world. Their fathers they scarcely see or know. The servants to whom they are left, and who are constantly being changed after the manner of London households, care nothing for them. What wonder if the poor little wretches themselves grow up selfish, hard, and cold-hearted under an arrangement so eminently uncalculated to make them anything else? The little Farquharsons were only average specimens of this type. They were not loving themselves, and they didn't want to be loved; and poor Susie, who was dearly fond of those rough and riotous young Turks, her own brothers and sisters, found her attempts at kisses and caresses so unpalatable to her pupils, and her appeals to their feelings so absolutely unintelligible by the light of their practical and self-interested young minds, that she had long ceased to offer them: feeling that it was better to resign herself to the "ways" of the household, than to expose herself to the mortification of being snubbed as gushing or "silly" by such very young persons.

Fortunately, her nature was not a rebellious one, and even her letters home—those letters which still enclosed nearly half of her small salary, a course rendered necessary by her stepfather's parsimony—contained no complaints in addition. Her mother's, to her, were far more effusive. She had added twin babies to the family at the vicarage, a liberty which her husband had justly resented by packing off the two younger Lane children to

the most economical and distant school his ingenuity could discover; and the poor woman, who had a mother's love for her offspring, found her new bed not altogether one of roses. She was too fond of her husband to complain of him, though she did so, freely enough, of other matters; and Susie's letters, in return, were chiefly filled with tenderest sympathy, questions as to the children, and other home matters. Of her own life she said little; it would grieve mother to fancy she was not happy, and, besides, she could not bear the idea of her stepfather being made the confidant of her private feelings. So even the luxury of home-letters was a very restricted one to her; and as to any other friendly communion, it may be sufficient to say that during the two years and a half in which she had lived in the Farquharson household, she had never yet enjoyed so long a conversation with anyone outside it as that into which the American girl had beguiled her.

There are so many girls whose one aim in life is to attract notice, that the very fact of their success is a shield to their quieter sisters; and, so far, Susie's plainness of dress and feature, her natural timidity, and the ceaseless "exigencies" of Flo and her brothers, had been effectual in shielding her from attention, either of a pleasant or unpleasant nature.

Yet this pretty American girl, with the gorgeous clothes, had noticed her, and persisted in doing so despite all the involuntary rebuffs with which shyness and reserve armed the young governess. She would talk, would ask questions, pity, and be confidential, till the mere remembrance of it all—of the sparkling, sympathetic eyes, the bits of family history so freely accorded; above all, the delicious pressure of that little, grey-gloved hand—made Susan Lane's pulses beat more quickly, and her cheeks burn with sympathetic excitement. She felt as if she had been reading the first volume of some exciting story, and longed to go on with it. Such a charming story, too, and such a charming heroine! She kept thinking about it in little interrupted bits all day; during the children's dinner, when Mrs. Farquharson addressed her three times, once to ask a question about the weather, and twice to beg that she would pay more attention to some defect in the children's manners; during the afternoon walk with the boys; while Flo partook of her post-prandial nap, and during the lessons which followed; during the turmoil

of schoolroom-tea, and the greater turmoil of the subsequent games; but most of all, and most happily, when the small fry were at last in their respective cots, and she was left at liberty to sit by the open window, with its dingy prospect of dead walls and back-yards, and dream of the delightful life led by the other girl, wondering where she would go that evening, and whether she would vex Calton by asking questions and "looking around." In her heart Susie said to herself that she could not imagine the fair American doing anything else; though she felt sure at the same time that the vexation was not of a very severe order. She was quite certain that Calton was very nice. The tone of his sister's "he's real good to me always!" had let her into a whole history of brotherly perfections and tenderness; and she even found herself trying to picture him, a tall, fair, broad-shouldered man, like his sister and yet unlike, with her blue eyes, only graver and more sober, her frankness with greater dignity; one who would be at once kind and firm and tender, full of

High thought and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

Susie's picture was so pleasant when finished that she sat contentedly looking at it in her mind's-eye until the entrance of a servant to light the gas aroused her from her meditations; but even then she got out Egbert's thumbed and inky atlas, and amused herself by tracing out, with the tip of her soft finger, the route over which the travellers had journeyed, and trying to imagine all the different wonders of the cities where they had stayed.

She had not spent such an idle or delightful evening for years.

There was no pretty American girl in the gardens next day, however; nor on the following one, though both Flo and Susie looked out anxiously for her.

"I don't like that lady; she told lies, she did," the small child remarked, wrathful at the non-appearance of her promised sweets; and though Susie said, "Fie, Flo! Hush! you shouldn't say that. The lady was only joking," her own disappointment was almost as great as the little girl's.

"Yet I never expected to see her again," she told herself stoutly. "How very, very silly I am!"

On the third day, however, as she was sitting quietly at the foot of Speke's monument, knitting and thinking, while Flo gambolled after a little dog at some

distance, a voice behind her—the very one in her mind—exclaimed :

"Well, this is strange! I was just calculating I might meet you again to-day, and here you are! How do you do? You haven't forgotten me, have you?" This last because poor, silly Susan, who had been dreaming of nothing else for three days and three nights, was too much taken aback by shyness and surprise at this sudden greeting to do anything but open her soft grey eyes to their utmost width, and colour all over like a rose bursting suddenly into blossom. "And for all the world as if I were a male being," the other girl said afterwards in describing it. "But it's the loveliest thing to see, and I'd give anything to know how to do it myself."

"Had you forgotten me?" she repeated, smiling so prettily that Susie—too charmed for either shyness or reticence—answered with almost childlike fervour:

"Forgotten! Oh no, I could not; you were so kind."

The pretty smile deepened and softened.

"Well, it's real nice of you to say so, anyway," she said, seating herself in a graceful little attitude beside Susie—her costume of fawn-coloured cambric and blue surah silk was more wonderful than ever, and she took great care not to crumple it, and just to show the right amount of her tiny bronze boot—"for I couldn't somehow forget you either. I felt like I must see you again; and I guess I know now why it was. I only knew before there was something sort of home-like in your eyes—I couldn't imagine what—that made me feel like crying when I looked at you."

"Do I remind you of anyone?" asked Susie.

She, too, "felt like crying" at the moment, but it was that anyone should speak to her so, and lay such dainty, caressing fingers on the sleeve of her shabby black jacket.

"Yes; and of the dearest friend I ever had—Elizabeth Emery. Oh, you wouldn't wonder at my feeling bad if you'd ever known her. She was just the loveliest soul in the world—lovely every way; and you're as like her as you can be. I'd give anything for Calton to see you, and yet—I don't know. I guess it would make him feel worse than me."

"Is she dead?" asked Susan softly, for the tremble in the American girl's voice seemed to bring them nearer than even her previous kindness.

"Yes; she died of small-pox, nursing a poor Irish help of her mother's, two years ago. It was then Calton came to Europe. He couldn't stay home afterwards. Indeed, we were most afraid he'd turn Catholic, and become a monk, or something; but General Valpy—he's a friend of ours in the Senate—got him a post in the embassy here, and he came over to London instead."

Some people might have smiled at the bathos here, but Susie was a young person sadly deficient in humour. She asked very earnestly, "Did your brother care for her, then?" and blushed crimson immediately afterwards at her own ill-bred curiosity. The other girl nodded.

"They were going to be married. He'd been engaged to her four years, but she wouldn't leave her mother before. She sacrificed herself every way. Oh, I did love Elizabeth Emery!"

Susie was silent. So this ideal hero, the "Arthur" of her imagination, had loved his—not Guinevere; rather the "lily maid," and had lost her, too, though not as Launcelot lost Elaine. It added something to her picture of him, and to the pretty story she had been reading. She almost started when her companion exclaimed with a gay laugh:

"Do tell, if we're not talking just like old friends, and all the while I've not even told you my name—have I?"

"Mine is Susan Lane," said Susie gently.

"And mine is Virginia Gale Medlicott. Do you know, I 'most wish yours had been Elizabeth; but it doesn't matter, for you're just as like her, anyhow, and I guess you're real good too. I thought so when I saw you so patient with that hateful child. Why, here she is!"

"Have you brought the sweets?" said Flo sternly. "Miss Lane said you was joking. I think joking is telling lies. Have you got them now?"

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